

## REDUCING RISK OF FOODBORNE ILLNESS ASSOCIATED WITH GREEN ONIONS AND OTHER PRODUCE – A GUIDE FOR THE RETAIL FOOD INDUSTRY

Like many foods consumed raw or lightly cooked, green onions should be considered a potential source of harmful bacteria in the retail food facility. However, there are a number of steps that can be taken in a restaurant or food service operation to minimize the chance of serving contaminated food.

1. Know your vendors. Buy from suppliers that follow good agricultural practice guidelines, use safe water for irrigation and processing, and provide restroom and handwashing facilities for their workers. This can be verified by audits, third party certification, or the implementation of hazard analysis critical control point plans (HACCP).
2. Follow good receiving and storage practices at your facility. Produce containers should be dated upon arrival and used on a “first-in, first-out” system. Inspect produce on arrival and do not accept produce that is grossly contaminated with dirt, soil, or other organic matter. Do not store produce on racks beneath raw meats, fish, or poultry.
3. Remove wilted, discolored, or bruised portions. Wash all raw produce that is not labeled “ready-to-eat” before cutting, chopping, or slicing. Discard any ice that may be packed with the produce. In a cleaned and sanitized sink, rinse produce under cold running water. Gentle rubbing with a soft brush made for use on food is ok. Don’t forget to clean and sanitize the brush before and after using. After washing, antibacterial agents may be used on raw produce if they are approved for food contact and used according to directions. However, these products are not 100% effective in removing or eliminating bacterial pathogens, nor do they completely remove viruses such as the one that causes hepatitis A.
4. Wash and sanitize all utensils, cutting boards, and containers used for cut produce before and after cutting, slicing, chopping, or dicing raw produce. Keep all raw meat, poultry, and fish that is not ready-to-eat separate from produce.
5. Before handling produce, employees must thoroughly wash their hands in warm water with soap, paying particular attention to the fingernails and fingertips. Clean hands must be dried with a clean, disposable towel.
6. After produce is washed and prepped, it must be handled as any other ready-to-eat food. Avoid bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat food whenever possible and store in covered containers.

For green onions in particular, those that wish to further decrease the risk of foodborne illness should cook this product thoroughly (to 185 degrees F for one minute) before serving. Quick sautéing, a common practice for preparing green onions, may not provide sufficient time and temperature to kill the hepatitis A virus.

Millions of people enjoy the benefits of healthful and tasty salads and other foods made from fresh produce every day. Unfortunately, there is no 100% guaranteed method of eliminating the risk of food borne illness in foods that are not cooked or otherwise processed. However, by following the above steps you can provide safe and wholesome food for your customers and clients.